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MEMORANDUM FOR

THE SECRETARY OF STATE

I would like to feel that we are moving forward rapidly and effectively in developing a comprehensive Southeast Asia plan for the case that we are obliged to accept a partition of Laos following a breakdown of the current Geneva negotiations. In such a situation, there might be a sudden resumption of active hostilities following the end of the rainy season next month. On the other hand, the military action might take the form of an increase in surreptitious infiltration which would be hard to prove but very dangerous in the long run.

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Last Thursday I received a briefing by the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the military planning which is going on. My understanding is that while SEATO Plan 5 would be the appropriate response to a clear renewal of invasion from the north, it does not cope with the problem of infiltration and the need to protect the flanks of South Vietnam and Thailand from the Viet Cong. I am very much interested in the possibility of dealing with this latter case through the cooperative military effort of South Vietnam, Thailand and Laos. However, even if such a course of action is feasible militarily, it will require very considerable effort to develop the political framework to support it.

I am informed that a State-JCS meeting took place last Friday where it was agreed to proceed rapidly with an interdepartmental plan based upon an assumed partition of Laos. This plan would undertake to minimize any territorial loss to the Communists in North Laos, to protect the flanks of South Vietnam and Thailand, and to stabilize South Laos, all largely through the use of indigenous forces with minimum U.S. participation. I hope that U.S. military participation can be limited to that required to assure the military cooperation of Thailand, Laos and Vietnam, and to obtain maximum military effectiveness from the local troops involved, particularly the FAL.

I am very much interested in the prompt development of such a plan and would like to discuss it with you whenever you think it timely.

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